

Denali

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Denali National Park and Preserve, Alaska



Denali Poems

Linda Schandelmeier

Writer-in-Residence 2012

Linda Schandelmeier is the author of *Listening Hard Among the Birches*, a collection of poetry published in 2002 by Vanessa Press, Fairbanks, Alaska. Her poetry has been awarded numerous prizes and distinctions, including an Artist-in-Residence at Denali National Park in 2012, a Rasmuson Individual Artist Project Award in 2007, and an Individual Artist's Fellowship from the Alaska State Council on the Arts in 1984. She is the winner of the Midnight Sun, Fejés, and Anchorage Daily News-UAA prizes for poetry. Linda's poems have been set to music in three song cycles, one of which, *Poem Against the Cold*, by British composer Corey Field, was performed at Carnegie Hall. A retired biologist and elementary school teacher, and an active master gardener, Linda lives near Fairbanks, Alaska.

Being in Denali National Park for 10 days was like stepping through a doorway into a landscape that was simultaneously familiar and foreign. I had visited the park multiple times over the previous 40 years, but had never stayed long enough to learn much about it. I knew the physical and emotional terrain only superficially. These Denali poems explore the literal and figurative landscape I found when I stepped through that metaphorical doorway that allowed me to experience the Park as a quiet participant and observer. Some of what I encountered (the bears at the window of the Murie cabin, the rams on Polychrome, the riotous budding and blooming flowers and shrubs, and the sandpipers and white-crowned sparrows) appear in the poems. I believe these poems celebrate the vastness of this space and reflect on how wild places allow us to connect with and learn from the other living things that share our planet.

Artist-in-Residence Program

Selected competitively through an open call for entries each year, artists spend ten days in Denali. From their experiences, they each create art pieces to donate to the park collection. Opinions expressed may not be shared by the National Park Service.

Learn more at

www.nps.gov/dena/historyculture/arts-program.htm

Denali National Park and Preserve

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The Sandpiper

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At the edge of the muskeg ponds,
near the place
where the boardwalk turns
toward the mountains,
a solitary sandpiper
bobs on its greenish-yellow legs,
probing for insects in the murky water.
Sun shifts through jumbled branches,
a wisp of breeze keeps away mosquitoes,
and cobbly rocks line the dry creek bed
we hike over.
Flowers unroll everywhere,
the yellow and rose louseworts,
violets, nagoonberries,
smolder with color.
But the bird with its
brown and white-splashed feathers,
long beak and elegant legs,
and unassuming grace and form,
is breathtaking.
As we approach
it flies to the top of a ragged spruce tree,
its wary high-pitched call
echoing off the wall of trees.
That call opens inside me.
It knows life's sorrow and desolation,
even today, this day in June,
punctuated with such impossible sweetness.

Bears

From the undertow of sleep,
noises on the porch,
I grab my glasses and a bear head
comes into focus at the cabin window.
We are face to face
eying each other.
My heart leaps, then settles
as she drops to all fours
and scoots down the driveway,
with her two-year-old in tow.
The city is distant
as they scatter into the sea-green willows.

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On Polychrome

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Rams
ahead of us
on the trail
slow
us down
while the sky
fidgets
blue,
then gray.
Just as
we reach the top
wind smears us
with cold rain
and hail.
We're
not as unconcerned
as the sheep.
Lightening cracks
close, silhouettes
our shivering,
as we skitter down
the mountain.

Lupines

When the blooming begins
I stare at them
sprawling on the river bank—
a blue mat
spilled into by violet
and lavender.
I don't know this color,
will never know it,
but it preoccupies me
like a dream
written in code.
The color unfurls inside me
aching like an absence
I am reminded of
watching the wind
in the leaves.
The way I remember them
each flower spike
claims its space,
maybe the whole sky.

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For the Windflowers

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I bow my head
with the windflowers.
For their white petals
tinged with blue-gray,
for their stems
curving in unison
toward the earth.
Like a symphony
for this place.

Denali Sojourn

I give myself up—
 the woman who gardens,
the wife,
 the brooder.
Sitting at this wooden table
 looking out the south window
at the mountains,
 I am deep in the spell
of those who stayed here before me.
Sometimes my mind goes blank
 staring at it all—
all the land,
 all the quiet.
Other times
 this place is
an opening,
a door
 I step through
where orange lichen
 bursting from the rock,
or a white-crowned sparrow's melodious song
can suddenly be alien or heartbreaking.

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A Meditation

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Red buds poke out of the shrubs,
silvery leaves lift
from their wrappings,
patches of yellow poppies
umbrella the hillside.
Even the carnivorous bog violet
sends up a purple bloom
while still devouring insects.
By sun they are washed,
by sun they hurry into bloom.
We have that too,
the love of warmth,
Spring's intensity.
Even when no one
is watching.